



February 12, 2019

Dear Senator,

On behalf of a unified coalition of health care professionals and community advocates from throughout Arizona, we are writing to strongly oppose the trio of vaccine related bills currently under consideration in the Arizona House of Representatives (HB 2470, 2471, and 2472). Given that vaccination is one of the cornerstones of preventing disease and improving the health of our society, we would like to register our strongest possible opposition to these bills.

Along with sanitation, clean food and water, and antibiotics, vaccination stands as one of the most important pillars of health improvement for the human species in our entire history. Diseases such as smallpox, polio, and diphtheria that in previous times killed and maimed thousands of people are now relegated to the history books. We should be doing everything we can to promote vaccination in as many people as possible, to preserve herd immunity (or community immunity). Herd immunity is the community protection that vaccines offer when at least 95% of the population is vaccinated. If the vaccination rate falls below that threshold, the community is at risk of disease spreading to those too young or sick to be vaccinated.

Which is why the three bills under consideration are so disturbing. HB 2470 seems to extend the concept of personal exemptions to vaccinations to include religious exemptions. No major religion opposes vaccinations, and clearly any religious concerns would already fall under the personal exemption language. Today, we see dangerous outbreaks of measles because of "exemptions" to vaccinations. As a matter of public safety, we should not be promoting more ways to avoid immunization. Allowing herd immunity to drop enough to let outbreaks occur is a severe danger to public health.

The clear intention of HB 2471 is to scare parents and reduce the number of vaccinations by requiring as much information as possible be provided regarding the extraordinarily low rate of adverse effects. Vaccines are one of the safest health interventions we have in all of health care. From the perspective of public health and policy, the emphasis on the minute chance of significant adverse events is not helpful. A Vaccine Information Sheet is already provided to parents with each vaccination, so adding an additional documentation burden provides only harm to the citizens of Arizona.

HB 2472 suggests that antibody titer tests should be offered as reasonable alternatives to vaccination. This idea betrays a profound misunderstanding of the immunology of vaccinations, the concept of herd immunity, and the immunobiology of infants. First, the majority of vaccinations need to be given within the first year of life. Antibody titers during this period are useless, due to the presence of maternal antibodies in the infant's blood. A positive

titer in these children means nothing regarding the child's own immunity. Second, the accuracy and utility of these titers in older patients is also not clear. Third, delaying or preventing immunizations in patients while titer tests are attempted to be arranged and possibly not even done is just bad policy. Even in the presence of a positive titer, it would not be bad from a public health perspective to administer the vaccine. Maximizing immunization rates should be our goal. We want to prevent dangerous diseases and save lives.

The bottom line is this: the World Health Organization lists reduction in immunization rates and loss of herd immunity as one of the top ten threats to public health in the world. The above legislation does nothing to reduce that threat, and everything to increase it. With rates of unimmunized children in Arizona already above 5%, we are in danger of breaching the basic societal contract we owe to each other to become vaccinated and establish a necessary herd immunity. For the lives of our citizens, we need to be implementing legislation that increases immunization rates, not reduces them. We, as advocates for patient and societal health, implore you not to lead Arizona to the bottom and contribute to the spread of untold disease and human suffering. Thank you for hearing our plea.

Sincerely,
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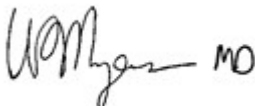
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